

BOYS' LIFE

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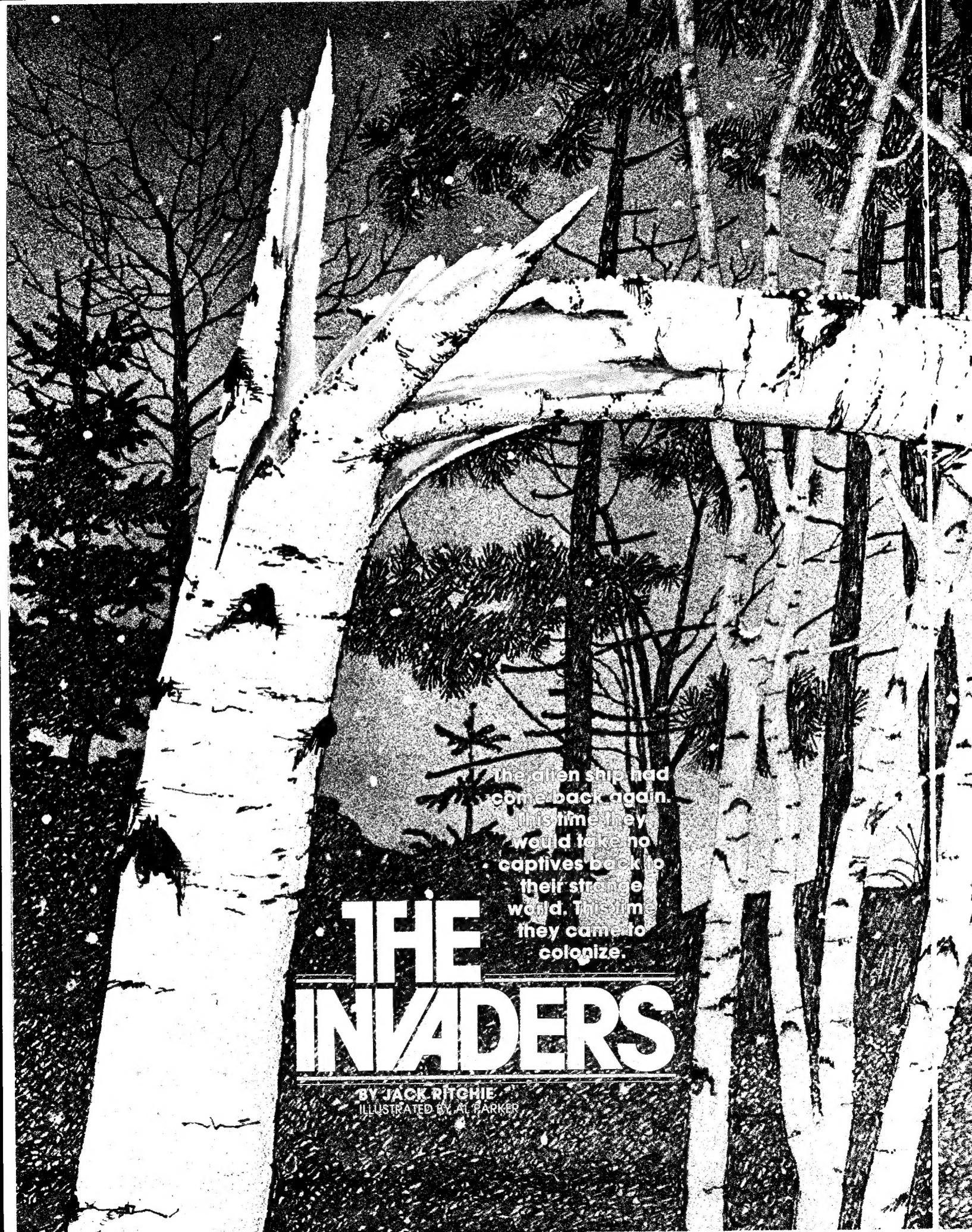
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The alien ship had
come back again.
This time they
would take no
captives back to
their strange
world. This time
they came to
colonize.

THE INVADERS

BY JACK RITCHIE
ILLUSTRATED BY AL PARKER

None of them left the ship on the first day of its arrival, but I knew that they would be watching carefully for signs of human life.

The skies were dark with scudding clouds, and the cold wind moved high in the trees. Thin snow drifted slowly to the ground.

From the cover of the forest, I now watched as a small, heavily armed group of them left the large craft. When they reached the edge of the woods, they hesitated for a few moments and then moved cautiously forward.

I had seen them before and I knew that in appearance, at least, they were not monsters. They looked very much like us. There were some differences, of course, but all in all, we were really quite similar.

I met them first when I was almost a boy and I had been without caution. I approached them and they seemed friendly, but then suddenly they seized me and carried me off in their strange ship.

It was a long journey to their land and when our ship made a landing, I was shown about and exhibited as though I were some kind of animal.

I saw their cities, and I was shown plants and animals completely strange to me. I learned to wear their clothing and even to eat their food.

They taught me to communicate in their strange and difficult tongue until I could, at times, even think in their language.

I had almost given up the hope of ever seeing my home again, but they one day put me back on one of their ships and told me that they were returning me because they wished to establish friendly relations with my people. But by now, I knew enough of them to know that this was not true. However, I nodded and smiled and watched for my opportunity to escape.

When the ship landed, I went out

with the first search party. It was near evening and as the darkness gathered, I edged away from them and finally I fled into the blackness and safety of the forest.

They came after me, of course, but I was hidden deep in the woods where they could not find me.

Finally they gave up and I watched their ship become smaller and finally disappear, and I hoped fervently that they would never return.

But now they were back again.

I felt a coldness inside of me as I watched them moving slowly through the trees. They seemed somehow different from the others who had been here before. It was not so much in their appearance as in the air about them—the way they walked, the way they looked about with speculating eyes.

Slowly and instinctively, I realized that this time they were not here on just another raid for a captive or two.

This time they had come to stay.

What could we do now? Could we lure them deeper into the forest and kill them? Could we take their weapons and learn how to use them?

No, I thought despairingly. There were so many more of the invaders on the ship. And more weapons. They would come out and hunt us down like animals. They would hunt us down and kill us all.

I sighed. We must find out what it was that they wanted this time and whatever it might be, we must learn to adjust and to hope for the best.

But I still retreated silently before them, afraid to approach. I watched them search the ground ahead of them and knew they were looking for footprints, for some signs of life. But there was not yet enough snow on the ground to track us down.

Their strangely colored eyes glanced about warily. They were cautious, yes.

They could be a cruel race, I knew.

I had seen with my own eyes how they treated their animals and even their own kind.

I sighed again. Yes, and we could be cruel, too. In this respect we could not claim to be superior to the invaders.

But perhaps this was all for the best. In many respects, theirs was by far the superior civilization. Could they teach us to live in peace? Could they end our wars, our slaughters?

They paused now in a clearing, their eyes gleaming beneath their helmets.

It was time for me to approach them.

I took a deep breath and stepped into the open.

Their weapons quickly pointed at me.

"Welcome," I said.

They stared at me, and then one of them turned to their bearded leader. "It appears that this savage can speak some English, Captain Standish."

"Welcome," I said again. But I wondered what they would do to my land and my people now. ♣

**Theirs
was a
cruel
race,
but so
was
ours.**